



Presented by Surprise Mayor Sharon Wolcott

Surprise Regional Chamber of Commerce

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What an exciting, challenging year! I look back to where we were when I came into office and I can only say.....WOW, look how far we have come! That kind of progress only happens with team work!

Last year at this time we all had questions about our city government, and there was an air of uncertainty....

Today, Surprise stands on much more stable ground, with a solid record of accomplishment in jobs and business, a much improved financial picture, a sharply focused council and government, with a lot of help from newly empowered residents like you.

Working together, we have made Surprise a better place.

-- We are finding and fixing problems, increasing efficiency in government.

-- Coming into our own in jobs and education, engaging our residents and building trust.

-- We have become a recognizable presence at the state capitol and a voice on economic development and transportation..... here at home, in the region and even in Washington D.C.

Getting Surprise on the right track meant taking a hard look at our finances and our council management practices.

It's no secret that spending without focus was spinning out of control in Surprise. When faced with that challenge as a new mayor.....I was also presented with two unacceptable choices: raising taxes or cutting service.

I chose neither!

Cities all around us faced the same choices, and many made the decision to cut core critical services such as police and fire in order to balance the books.

I won't second guess those decisions because for each of us....the big picture is slightly different. But I stand firm in the belief that our aggressive approach to:

- Reforming government,
- Taking stock of our basic needs,
- Streamlining processes and
- Reining in bureaucracy are the ingredients to success in Surprise.

I want to say thank you to your City Council... Each and every one of you. You took a stand and together we have made some tough decisions that have turned our City around.

That's not to say we haven't felt the pinch of doing more with less. But through it all we have accomplished our goal of maintaining city services without tax increases.

Our employees have worked hard to make this possible... led by our City Manager Chris Hillman.

It has been a challenging year for them but together they have made it work and we appreciate every bit of their effort this year!

Moving forward, we will focus every penny of our precious resources on the building blocks for our future. That takes discipline, that takes innovation and that takes pride of purpose...all of which our city has learned to embrace this past year. We are working together as an organization to build a better Surprise.

Many of you have heard me say time and again that Surprise is the 10th largest city in Arizona. And because of this Surprise should be a leader in this region, not a poster child for the state, or the private sector or even the media to admonish.

What we have done, as a council...as a staff...as a community is prove that government CAN reform itself. Government CAN be accountable and transparent. We CAN heal our self inflicted wounds.

We've spent the past year pushing that reset button....and we are not finished.

But while retracing our steps....in some cases.... a twenty year look back, we were not *crippled* by our past. We were motivated....more than ever...to keep growing our businesses, thereby growing our revenues and providing better, more efficient services....while saving money.

We will remember 2012 for doing things differently...both organizationally and for taking a regional perspective.

A perfect example is how we reformed an ineffective in-house Dial-A-Ride service with a 25% denial rate into a true regional Para-transit operation.

Better service at half the cost!

Under our new agreement with Valley Metro no one is refused service

We have saved the taxpayers of Surprise \$130,000 this fiscal year and \$373,000 next fiscal year.

This really is a "Game Changer".

I want to publicly thank Rolland Winters, from our Disability Advisory Commission for his input and for his compelling personal testimony in support of these reforms.

This kind of collaboration with our citizen advisors is a perfect example of how we need to interface with our Volunteer Boards and Commissions, And how their input is a meaningful citizen component of policy making.

On that note... Councilman Biundo has done a brilliant job leading development of a Boards and Commissions handbook to guide our standing commissions....to clearly define the importance of these roles to a growing community and highlight the value of their guidance to us as an elected body.

And for the first time, our commissions are included in the budget process.

I promised you we would keep you better informed and I am sure you have noticed a big difference with the help of our staff.

-- We have been taking City Hall out to you, holding Town Hall meetings and coffee gatherings all around the city.

-- I launched an interactive web site to keep you informed. I am even getting the hang of tweeting so follow me @MayorWolcott.

-- We launched a "Notify Me" alert so you can hear directly from your council via email on breaking news important to your neighborhood and your family.

For the first time, we have City Council working together in sub-committees, directly with staff and citizens to process new ideas for council action.

-- Our subcommittees have reviewed everything from best practices shared by our regional partners to the rules that guide us.

-- A special thanks to Councilman Woodard who chaired a sub-committee which assembled generations of outdated council policies and procedures to make them easier to review.

-- Our personnel sub-committee helped council draft a review process for appointed officials that we have institutionalized as our own. This process gives clear guidance to these appointed officials, creating stability and accountability with our staff relationships.

Last year, Councilman Williams became the most engaged and tireless Vice Mayor Surprise has ever seen. This year, we will enhance the role of Vice Mayor even more, by creating a standing sub-committee of Rules which our new Vice Mayor Jim Biundo, will chair.

Congratulations vice Mayor Biundo on your selection. I look forward to working closely with you this year.

I promised an open window on city finances, and we had a record number of public budget workshops last year, broadcast live on Channel 11 and the web, complete with citizen comment

It was the most transparent budget process ever,

You can be sure the upcoming budget will be just as open, just as transparent.

In 2012 we made the down payment for our residents..for greater citizen engagement...for connectivity and for regionalism.

The news coming out of Luke Air Force Base is one such example of a successful regional partnership.

We all can take some credit for creating the momentum behind the Air Force decision announced last July to bring the Next Generation F35 Fighter Jet training mission to Luke.

The plan to train F35 pilots for the Air Force, the Navy and the Marines, secures Luke's mission for decades and is a boon to the statewide economy.

Our coalition of cities, Maricopa County, the State of Arizona and our Congressional delegation together made this happen. This is something we all truly achieved together.

Our strong, united support made a big difference as the selection of Luke saved thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in annual economic impact.

We anticipate 2,300 construction jobs to improve Luke's facilities and an additional 1,000 ongoing full-time jobs will be generated by this new mission.

Attracting and maintaining head of household jobs is a National priority...and Surprise Arizona has done its fair share.

-- We've opened a lot of businesses and broken a lot of ground this past year in Surprise. I recall one of those celebrations happening right here at the Colonnade in September!

-- The manufacturing and retail openings we saw in the video demonstrate how our economic base is growing and becoming more diverse

-- Companies like Southwest Products, Intrepid Tools and Brentwood Industries join multi-national corporations like Rio Glass and the newly expanded Gestamp Solar Steel... as manufacturers in Surprise who appreciate our strategic location, rail transportation, available land, ready and willing workforce, and welcoming city government.

-- Larry Miller, Wal-Mart, Coulter Nissan and Steinmart are delivering what our residents want....more shopping opportunities.

-- When a commercial developer like Moshi Silagi makes a \$10 million bet on Surprise by building the biggest spec building the city has ever seen; you can sense an important shift in direction!

-- And when people said they wanted bowling... we delivered by bringing Uptown Alley to the city!

-- You know, when I invited government leaders from around the region to come see Surprise...to see how much energy and fun we have here...well, team bowling at Uptown Alley was a unique and entertaining way to get everybody talking.

-- And believe me, there is a buzz building about Surprise all over the Valley. They can't wait to come back this year for another look!

The bottom line is this:

-- 600-thousand square feet of new construction

-- 400 new, permanent career positions and 300 construction jobs.

-- \$55 million in new capital investment in our community

-- This is what aggressive, business friendly policies can do!

I promised you that I would engage our business community in City Hall as never before by creating a Business Roundtable, where you can tell me frankly of your challenges and concerns, and how the city can work more closely with you to make you successful.

Now I am meeting quarterly with Business Roundtable representatives of the Chamber, business community, and Community and Economic Development staff.

I want to thank Council members Skip Hall and Richard Alton for joining in these discussions.

When we see accomplishments such as a smoother permitting process and online business license applications, you know these conversations are producing results.

We have a lot to celebrate, including a successful, dynamic Regional Chamber of Commerce and the excitement Ab Jackson is bringing as its new director.

-- Ab, your Mayor and Council are cheering you on from the 330 turn. We are committed to getting the City and the Chamber to the finish line.

This year I was asked to join the Board of Directors of the Greater Phoenix Economic Council. What an opportunity to build on our growing list of economic development contacts from around the world.

We continue to build our reputation as a community that knows how to personalize business recruitment and retention.

You can't overestimate the importance of rolling out the red carpet, of showing business leaders we want them here and will work to make it easy for them to choose Surprise.

We can learn a lot from our neighbors and they need to know us better.

We are having conversations with leaders who are doing great things in other parts of the Valley, like Phoenix Mayor Greg Stanton and Phoenix City Councilman Sal DiCiccio, and Mayors Scott Smith of Mesa and Tempe Mayor Mark Mitchell.

Regional relationships are the key to finding answers to our biggest questions... about transportation... water resources...and economic development.

Yes, we have a lot to celebrate....but we must never lose sight of our core mission, which is to:

-- "Develop and maintain a high standard of community life through shared vision, superior service and sustainable practices."

-- That is a mission based on principle and on the acknowledgment that as a city, first and foremost.... We are here to serve the citizens of Surprise...while making responsible plans for the citizens of tomorrow...

-- Ensuring a reliable water supply is one of those issues foremost in our minds.

-- Water in the desert is precious and limited. Its availability, and the way we use it, should drive our land use vision.

-- We must make every decision with water in mind. What is available to us? How do we use it wisely? How do we develop water conservation as a community value?

-- These kinds of common sense considerations are really what sustainability means.

-- Councilmen Hall and Williams are leading our discussion, and I want to thank them for their leadership.

-- You can be sure that concerned Surprise residents will be welcome at the table.

During my campaign, a small but vocal group of citizens briefly emerged who fear the concept of smart growth and want to drive us away from sustainable practices.

-- Sustainability is not a "dirty word. Sustainability takes hard work, innovation and vision.

-- Don't ask us to leave behind the public investments already made in our community in favor of all new growth....

-- Simply wrecking and paving over thousands of acres of fragile desert...open space our citizens say they want protected...is an approach this Council will not support.

-- We support growth....but we support balanced, responsible growth that includes reinvestment in our core.

-- These are critical strategic issues that must be dealt with as a community.

In fact, the entire notion of acting strategically is another change we have brought to City Hall.

-- Too often our city has been defined by short term thinking

-- We had a skeleton of a strategic plan, but no real commitment to it, and consequently no real focus.

-- Now, this Mayor and this Council are putting flesh on those bones.

In coming months, you will see us complete a true strategic plan, one that will actually guide how Surprise does business.

Along these lines, a highly motivated group of engaged citizens is at work right now drafting the Surprise General Plan 2035....they are doing an amazing job.

-- As they put the finishing touches on a recommendation to the Council, and a vote by you this fall, I promise their plan has engaged more people than any city activity in years.

-- That's how powerful your involvement can be!

And this FALL we will see our first elections under our newly redrawn district boundaries. Let me say this to our community as we begin this election season:

-- Every election brings the opportunity to serve our residents.

-- Those who have the desire to join us in community service need to recognize that Surprise has changed.

-- So let's hear new, positive ideas.

-- We're a changed community, a better community.

Let's talk about what Surprise is becoming...with our eyes clearly focused on the future...and with a healthy respect for the dream of our founders.

Without that focus a bright future isn't guaranteed...

There is work to be done and decisions to be made.

But we need to remember how narrow thinking hurt us in the past.

For far too long, out-of-date thinking with regard to our transportation policies has driven our approach to growth.

-- "Build the grid," the thinking went, and economically, socially, magically... everything will be alright.

-- The result is that for more than a decade, we have been in the thrall of a plan called Prop 400.

-- Dependent on overworked sales taxes, which crash whenever the economy slows down, many Prop 400 promises just never happened.

That really hurt us in the West Valley, where we still fight for our share of transportation investments...

Needs have changed, the economy has changed, the whole country has changed!

These old ideas need to be rethought.

The new "Regionalism" is all about connection, and that means capitalizing on the infrastructure that allowed Surprise to happen in the first place.

-- We cannot ignore those qualities that once made Grand Avenue truly Grand!

-- I am committed to uniting with our neighboring cities along Grand Avenue, and I urge you to join me.

-- Under-developed, under-appreciated and neglected are the words that come to mind when contemplating Grand Avenue. But no more!

The COMPASS Charter has been signed by mayors all along Grand, including Phoenix Mayor Stanton. It commits us for the first time to think collectively, while respecting the unique character of each of the cities along the corridor.

Next month, I will present The Grand Avenue project as a challenge to a panel of urban designers in New Orleans.....I look forward to their expert input.

Surprise and others missed opportunities on Grand over the years. Our challenge now is to refocus Grand Avenue as a community cornerstone and rebrand it as a critical corridor for moving people and creating jobs.

And speaking of critical roads... we have made great progress in our quest to find the right solution for moving traffic safely and efficiently through the Bell/Grand intersection without compromising our businesses or community's heritage.

ADOT and MAG know we are serious about solving this problem and are working full-time to help us get this done!

Special thanks to Councilmen Roy Villanueva for bringing attention to the origins of Surprise and working to find a way to revitalize that important gateway to our City.

Another opportunity along Grand Avenue comes from the successful WEST MEC bond election from last November.

I believe a new WEST MEC facility for high school students seeking valuable vocational or technical career in Surprise could be the catalyst....and possibly the focal point of a revitalized Grand Ave., creating a sense of arrival and a sense of place to the very grounds that were not envisioned to "ever amount to much".

One promise kept from Prop 400 is the final construction of the 303.

-- This fall, the 303 freeway will finally be complete through our community.

-- This year, we will see full, 6 lane freeway access from the southern end of the city all the way to I-17.

-- We already see the economic impact as new auto dealerships and retail stores opened along the 303 at Prasad.

-- ADOT says the 303 expansion to I-10, including the I-10 interchange, will be complete by the end of 2014.

-- That will mean a full freeway from I-10 to I-17, opening up Surprise as never before...and creating all-freeway access to the entire Valley!

As exciting as this is, I see an even more significant transportation element on our future horizon.

-- In 2012, Congress authorized Interstate 11, making it eligible for federal funding.

-- I know many people are hearing about I-11 for the first time...so let me tell you about it!

-- The I-11 corridor shifts traffic around metro Phoenix just west of Surprise extending to the north and south.

-- Interstate-11 will link Arizona to Canada and Mexico... America's top two trading partners.

That means an international trade corridor of people, goods and ideas traveling on roadways, by rail, air and even fiber optics.

Arizona is just starting to talk about I-11, but as I told members of Congress in Washington in September, this is the corridor that will unlock our economic potential.

We are grateful for Congressman Frank's leadership in helping this multi-billion dollar trade corridor come to fruition.

Every billion dollars in exports creates 7,000 US jobs.

Connecting main street Surprise with trading partners in Mexico and Canada assures a future of almost unlimited possibility...

And I intend, with your help, to lead us there.

So, you can begin to see an exciting vision of our future coming into focus, a connected, financially sound, business friendly community with united leadership.

Now many have wondered when, if ever.... Surprise would come into its own with a real downtown. Surprise City Center is more than a dream on a planners map. It is a vision in need of a strong working partnership between the city, the development partnership and believe it or not, the city of Phoenix which once owned this land.... when it functioned as the Auxiliary field for Luke Air Force base.

We have always been strong partners of the mission of Luke Air Force base, and we support the statutory protections of Luke's Mission. That is a trust we will never violate.

But no true vision of our City Center could rise from the desert without a full understanding of our long partnership with Luke.... and without the release of the deed restrictions held by the city of Phoenix since 1990.

I am thrilled to tell you today...we are nearing the time when we will begin to write the newest and perhaps most exciting chapter about Surprise's future.

Last summer, I began the process of negotiating a path forward. With the support of Phoenix Mayor Greg Stanton, and partnership of Brigadier General Michael Rothstein and Luke Community Initiative Director Rusty Mitchell, we can see a clear path ahead. I want to express my personal

gratitude to each of them for working with me and for acknowledging our desire to best serve our city's future, while supporting a lasting mission at Luke.

-- After 23 years in suspense, we must make certain it was worth the wait.

-- We are committed to making the development of Surprise City Center part of our legacy of building a vibrant downtown, featuring urban style living, recreation and entertainment, healthcare, and higher education.

-- We believe there is no greater promise we can deliver to future generations than growing our higher education opportunities right here in Surprise. Preparing students for the head of household jobs we continue to attract, is a critical part of our long range economic strategy.

-- And when colleges come knocking on our door, they discover our community has already invested millions in sports and recreation facilities....amenities a blossoming college campus can ill afford to build on its own.

-- They discover we have experience developing partnerships that not only enhance our community, but yield long term economic benefits for us and for the region.

-- We are proud to be the Cactus League home of the Royals and Rangers for the past decade. We see the benefit of keeping this partnership well into the future. Over \$60 million in economic activity in Surprise and the west valley from our sports facilities, and...

-- A recent survey reveals the Cactus League generates a \$632 million dollar impact to Arizona.

-- We are now positioned locally, regionally and nationally as never before to leverage even more economic drivers that will grow our economy in Surprise.

This theme of the new leadership you see in Surprise is bringing people together.

Good leaders build relationships, they don't tear them down.

When I came into office, our relationship with the Dysart Unified School District needed work.

We have in common the greatest of our community assets: our children, their care, and their future.

I knew we had to reach out and we had to build bridges

With Vice Mayor Williams in the lead, and with the gracious and enthusiastic support of Superintendent Gail Pletnick and the Dysart Board, and the full engagement of our city manager Hillman....we immediately made progress.

-- By June, the Dysart Board and the Surprise Council were able to approve a new intergovernmental agreement that calls for a partnership approach to our shared facilities.

-- A few weeks ago we rolled out a nationally-recognized anti-bullying campaign not just in one school, but in every Dysart school across the city...

-- Making schools safer for students allows them to learn more... and become the future leaders we need to continue this vision of progress we begin today.

Education at all levels is a critical component of our Strategic Plan.

With leaders like Doctor Pletnick, Melissa Holdaway from Arizona Charter Academy and, Mr. Bill Collins from Nadaburg School District

Surprise has witnessed an impressive trend towards academic excellence for all of our youth.

Surprise is very fortunate to have a committed youth leader as part of our Council team, District 3 Councilmember and outgoing Vice Mayor Williams.

John can't be here today...he is teaching!

But his enthusiasm and energy are earning Surprise a regional voice on youth issues while building tomorrow's leaders.

John hosts an annual Youth Leadership Summit here in Surprise and has even taken this to the regional level, organizing the first ever West Valley Youth Council.

John always says these are the young people who one day will take our seats on the Council and in the Mayor's Office, in management positions and as neighborhood activists, and it is so exciting to see it happening right before our eyes!

For too many years our future was hamstrung by the uncertainty of failed policies.

Last year, we made the tough decisions necessary to reverse that trend.

Today I stand before you to attest that thanks to our bold actions we have shed the uncertainty.

Yes, work remains.... but our path is now finally clear and we are moving forward confident the desired results are achievable.

Today, as we begin work we are unified, open and forthright with residents about what we can do and what we need to do.

I am proud of the progress we have made since you elected me to be your Mayor.

I am excited with the strides taken by this Council, this staff, this community to come together.

I am looking forward to all that we can accomplish this year, growing jobs, creating efficiencies, saving tax dollars and improving our quality of life.

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A year ago, we said together we can get the job done.

Today, we can say together we did exactly that.

So let me leave you with words that have inspired me...

Dance like no one is watching.

Love like you've never been hurt.

Work like you don't need the money.

Live like it's heaven on earth.

Thank you and I look forward to working with you in 2013!

--End---